# Governed cases vs semantic cases - a view from morphology

**Explorations in Syntactic Government and Subcategorisation**

31 August – 3 September 2011, University of Cambridge

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Booij (1994, 1996, 2007) has drawn a distinction between two sorts of inflection. Contextual inflection is mandated purely by syntactic dependence, typically agreement or government. As such it need contribute no semantic content. Examples are subject-verb agreement in English or Dutch (or non-pro-drop languages generally) and gender/number/case/ agreement between attributive adjective and head noun. Inherent inflection is not so mandated but is part of an obligatory set of grammatical contrasts. Plural marking on nouns and (past) tense marking on verbs in English are prototypical examples. Since inherent inflection is not the result of an agreement/government dependency it will presumably always be associated with some kind of semantic content, and, indeed, it isn't uncommon to see grammarians writing 'semantic representations' for plural or past tense forms along the lines [PLURAL[CAT(x)]] or [PAST[WALK(x)]].

In a lexeme-based realizational model of morphology or in any descriptive framework that tries to distinguish inflection from derivation such representations would illicit, *sensu stricto*, because it is derivation that adds semantic content, while inflection serves to realize the content of morphosyntactic features (which in most cases are properties of whole phrases rather than individual lexical items). However, as Booij points out the existence of inherent inflection raises the question of how to demarcate inflection and derivation. Syntactic government (and agreement) are canonically realized by contextual inflection. However, the distinction proves less than straightforward. A well-known problem is that in pro-drop languages verb-argument agreement co-occurs with 'pronominal incorporation' in which the verb morphology actually expresses the pronominal features rather than cross-referencing those of an overt pronominal. Less well-known is a comparable problem with adjective-noun agreement. In many languages an adjective or participle denoting a person can be converted into a noun ('the good, the bad and the ugly'). Such a noun will often obligatorily reflect the gender of the referent, even though no agreement is involved. In German, the deadjectival noun even has to reflect the definiteness of the phrase it heads (along the strong/weak declension class dimension) (Spencer 2002).

In this paper I explore the problems of drawing a distinction between contextual and inherent inflection in the context of case marking on the basis of data from the nominal system of Selkup, a Samoyedic (Uralic) language. Nouns inflect for number, possessor agreement and a dozen or so cases. These include 'structural cases' (nom., acc., gen.), which are presumably governed by verb/noun heads, and a host of 'semantic' cases (instrumental, caritive, translative, co-ordinative, dative/allative, illative, locative, elative, prolative) which can be lexically governed, like prepositions in English prepositional verbs (rely on etc.) (There is also a vocative, which like all vocatives

has a very obscure role in syntactic/lexical organization.) I sketch a treatment of case inflection within a variant of Paradigm Function Morphology, in which it is possible for an inflected word form in a lexeme's paradigm to received an additional semantic predicate (as in derivation) but without creating a novel lexeme (unlike derivation). The semantic extension is triggered as a default relationship by an inflectional case feature value ([CASE:locative] or whatever), permitting the case-marked noun to head an adjunct phrase. However, this default can be overridden, so that a 'semantic' case can serve as a subcategorized or governed argument without (necessarily) contributing any semantics.

In addition, nouns have three adjectival forms, a pure relational adjective (a pure transposition), a similitudinal adjective, and a locational adjective. All three adjectivals can be formed from stems marked for possessor agreement (though not number marking), giving rise to words with meanings such as 'similar to our(dual) house' or '(having the property of being) in their(plural) canoe'. These adjectival forms therefore have to be treated morphologically as inflected forms of a noun. The similitudinal and locative adjectival forms resemble corresponding case forms with an adjectivizing suffix while the relational adjective resembles the root form (which also serves as the nom. sg. form) with the same suffix. They can thus be analysed either as noun-to-adjective transpositions of case marked forms or as autonomous portmanteau adjectival suffixes that are in paradigmatic opposition to the cases and hence morphologically, at least, part of the case system. In either event the adjectivals represent word-class changing inflection (transposition). Similitudinal/locative adjectives would appear to constitute an instance of meaningful morphology, which nonetheless is part of the noun's inflectional paradigm. In this respect the three adjectival forms differ from more clearly derivational forms, such as the privative adjective ('lacking N') or the proprietive adjective ('having N'), which are incompatible with the possessor agreements and behave like typical derived lexemes. The reason for the existence of such relational adjectives (noun-to-adjective transpositions) is to allow a lexeme with nominal reference to serve as an attributive modifier. This is a purely grammatical exigency, yet it doesn't fall in any obvious way under the rubric of either government or subcategorization. In Selkup the relational adjective may either express no grammatical meaning at all (pure transposition) or it may express the default semantics of the (inflectional!) case form. In this respect the relational adjectives differ from so-called possessive adjectives in many languages which, where grammaticalized, express something like a 'genitive' relationship.